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Viewing cable 06BEIRUT2464, TFLE01: BERRI SAYS ISRAEL WON'T WIN

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06BEIRUT2464	2006-07-25 13:33	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL/NOFORN	Embassy Beirut

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VZCZCXRO0473
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ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 251333Z JUL 06
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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4772
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 002464

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/25/2016
TAGS: [IS](#) [LE](#) [MOPS](#) [PBTS](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: TFLE01: BERRI SAYS ISRAEL WON'T WIN

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey D. Feltman. Reason: Section 1.4 (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C/NF) In July 25 meeting with Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri, the Ambassador followed up Secretary Rice's visit in presenting updated elements for a cease-fire package. Berri, after his customary review of Israeli acts, said he was still doubtful Hizballah would accept the proposal if a prisoner exchange was not upfront. The Ambassador said that the issue of prisoner exchanges was a dead end. Berri believed that Hizballah was winning the war, citing the bloody fighting at Bint Jbeil as an example. He claimed that the IDF still has not conquered the strategic southern town. Without responding substantively on the proposal for a multinational stabilization force, Berri argued that resolution of the Shebaa Farms dispute must be a part of the package. If Shebaa Farms are not included in the plan, Berri said he would oppose disarming Hizballah; but if the Shebaa Farms issue is resolved then Hizballah's arms are no longer needed. End summary.

BERRI REVIEWS PACKAGE
CEASE-FIRE DEAL

¶2. (C/NF) On July 25, the Ambassador and econoff met with Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri and his foreign affairs adviser Ali Hamdan to follow up on the Secretary's cease-fire proposal. The Ambassador said that the Secretary, in Israel, is working towards a unified cease-fire package to include: 1) prohibition of any armed presence from a certain distance from the Blue Line, 2) an embargo on arms sales to anyone in Lebanon except the GOL, 3) LAF deployment to the south, along with a strong international stabilization force, 4) a commitment to no more armed element attacks on Israel, 5) a commitment to resolve the Shebaa Farms issue, and 6) humanitarian assistance for southern Lebanon. The multinational stabilization force is essential, the Ambassador said. He emphasized that Israel won't stop its military campaign unless there is something new that prevents a return to the status quo ante. The Secretary's proposal not only benefits Lebanon in that it stops the fighting; it will also mean reconstruction, security, and new jobs for Lebanon.

¶3. (C/NF) Berri thanked the Ambassador, and wanted to clarify press reports that said he rejected the Secretary's plan out of hand yesterday. He denied he said that, and sent MP Ali Hassan Khalil to speak on LBCI on his behalf. Berri said the situation is getting grim; some 100,000 people have fled to Syria, while there are 700,000 internally displaced persons inside Lebanon. Berri added that he has Amal officials working alongside the police making sure that people don't take over vacated houses like during the civil war. Berri also referred to the recent bombardment of Nabatiyeh that devastated the town. Four Amal officials have been killed trying to deliver medical assistance, according to Berri.

¶4. (C/NF) Turning to the proposal for using a multinational stabilization force to get a cease-fire, Berri flatly said that he did not think it would work. Any cease-fire must include an upfront prisoner exchange, which Berri claimed he could make happen within a week. He was not optimistic that Hizballah would agree to the package deal. Then Berri launched into a double-standard argument: why shouldn't the proposed international stabilization force be deployed in northern Israel as well as southern Lebanon; why not reinforce and strengthen UNIFIL? Berri disagreed that Israel needs to make sure it doesn't reward hostage-taking. After all, it was his Amal militia that originally captured Israeli airman Ron Arad (before losing custody) for whom Israel was going to offer him thousands of prisoners.

BERRI: HIZBALLAH IS WINNING

15. (C/NF) Berri did not believe that Hizballah was desperate for a cease-fire. In fact, Berri argued that the Israel was taking casualties in the battle for Bint Jbeil. According to Berri, Israel yesterday lost two soldiers in the ground fighting, two pilots in a helicopter crash, and 3-4 Merkava tanks. As of today, Israeli forces have not been able to enter Bint Jbeil, said Berri. Israel tried to ""paradrop"" (probably helo-drop) commandos into Bint Jbeil, and failed in that attempt, too. What has the IDF done in 13 days, marveled Berri. They captured Maroun el-Ras, but ""it is not Los Angeles, it only has two houses!""

SHEBAA FARMS IS KEY

16. (C/NF) The Ambassador argued that Israel will not accept a return to the status quo ante. At the same time, Lebanon has an opportunity now that the USG is considering ideas that might resolve the Shebaa Farms issue. Berri noted that the Shebaa Farms are crucial. If Shebaa Farms are not turned over to Lebanon, Berri said that he personally would oppose disarming Hizballah. But if the Shebaa Farms are ""liberated,"" then ""who needs"" Hizballah? Berri concluded that he understood that inclusion of the Shebaa Farms issue this was a positive step, and agreed to keep looking for a solution to the current crisis. (Comment: Berri stuck to the same line he had used with the Secretary -- cease-fire and prisoner exchanges -- which the Ambassador said would lead to a quick dead end. But, today, Berri seemed to offer a hint of support for a different approach, if he was assured that Shebaa Farms would be part of the package. Berri seems to have moved ever so slightly overnight. End comment.)

FELTMAN